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SOCIAL STRUCTURE

2. INTERNAL ORGANIZATION: AUTHORITY AND MACHINERY OF JUSTICE

In the internal organization of Shamirpet two different units can be clearly delineated. The socio-religious organization of the village with its independent set of office-bearers and functionaries is quite distinct from the administrative organization of government and semi-government officials.

The following diagram will illustrate the internal organization of the village in socio-religious matters:

Deshmukh
(Headman of the village)

Panchayat
(Village council)

Ganadi
(Organizers of village ritual)

Kulam-pedda
(Headmen of the different castes)

Peddamanshi
or
Inti-pedda
(Head of the family)

The Deshmukh is the hereditary headman of the village. He is the richest person in the settlement and has very considerable landed property. His forefathers became the headmen of the village some three hundred years ago, and since then the family has retained the title and office. By virtue of his wealth, position and the contacts he maintains with powerful government officials, the Deshmukh is a pivotal figure in the village and enjoys a position of great influence. Although his word is no longer law, he still wields very great influence in the village and is always given a place of honour at all village ceremonies. Village disputes of any importance are always referred to him, and his decisions and wishes are seldom disregarded. However, the Deshmukh takes very few decisions on his own authority and initiative. He seeks the help of the *panchayat*, which can be regarded as the central council for the village as a whole. Of course, the Deshmukh takes a prominent part in the deliberations and discussions of the *panchayat* and often guides it in such a way that his wishes in the matter are carried out.

The *panchayat* or village council consists of the headmen of

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623 564 castes; they are expected to do much more. In fact, a caste headman is the link between the residents of the village belonging to his own caste and, on the one hand, the common organization of the village as a unit, and, on the other, the wider caste organization of the entire neighbouring region. When the caste *panchayat* of the entire block constituting the regional community holds its meeting it is invariably the caste headman who participates in its deliberations on behalf of his village caste group. The office is hereditary, passing from father to son. But if the son has not attained maturity at the time of the death of his father, and is consequently not in a position to take over the responsibility, one of the brothers of the deceased may exercise the authority on behalf of the minor. In some cases even after attaining maturity the son remains only the nominal head, while his uncle continues to be the *de facto* chief. The general consensus of opinion regarding the function of the caste headman appears to be that 'he should keep his people under control' and 'not allow them to stray from the traditional ways of life'. 'If boys of my community do not behave themselves, the *panchayat* reprimands me for not keeping them under control. The village headman says that I must check them, but what powers do I have?' remarked one caste headman. With regard to his functions there is a general unanimity. 'Under a good caste headman boys of the caste obey established authority, respect is shown to the elders and quarrels are not often heard from houses in his jurisdiction.' All this he must do by the sheer force of his personality, for the nature of his authority is not well defined. 'He must be strict and firm, and also considerate and helpful. If he is only strict he will not be able to get the willing co-operation of his people. If he is too lenient nobody will pay any heed to what he says.' It has been pointed out earlier that some of the caste headmen are only nominal members of the *panchayat* and that at its meetings others speak on behalf of the caste. With one exception, these caste headmen lack the above qualities, and in general their caste people do not have much regard for their views. At least two of the hereditary caste chiefs are regarded with scorn by their own people and with ridicule by the villagers. Among the successful caste headmen, E. D. R., the leader of the Kapu (agriculturist) group, may be mentioned. He is in his late thirties, but even older people listen to him. If a son does not show due regard to his parents or a husband and wife quarrel too often and too publicly;

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if one of his caste fellows fails to fulfil the terms of his obligations or in any other way brings dishonour to the caste; if boys get unmanageable or girls earn an evil reputation for easy virtue, he effectively enters the scene, gives suggestions and advice, admonishes people if they do not seem amenable to persuasion, and in the case of adolescents and young boys may even inflict light corporal punishment. In his dealings with people E. D. R. possesses some dramatic qualities which make him something of a hero to his people. With his great influence in the counsels of the village he commands obedience from his own caste fellows as well as from many others. V. P. R., in a sense E. D. R.'s rival, has also a strong personality, and although he is not the recognized head of the caste he exercises considerable control over 'his area of influence'. Because of his influence he is one of those who are invited to participate in the deliberations of the *panchayat*. However, the two men exercise considerable tact in dealing with each other, and so far there has been no effective challenge to the position of E. D. R. The position of the head in a caste is what its holder chooses to make it. Ambitious rivals can steal some of his light and authority. If he proves unsuitable he may for all practical purposes be superseded by someone who is abler or more ambitious and aggressive.

The structure of the family and part played by the 'head' in its affairs will be analysed in a subsequent chapter. It will suffice here to point out that the type of family organization in Shamirpet and the neighbouring rural areas is patrilineal and patrilocal. Joint families are regarded as ideal, although there is a tendency for sons to separate after marriage, and brothers almost always separate some time after the father's death. The eldest male is generally regarded as the chief of the household, and, according to tradition, he must benevolently dominate the scene. Younger members of the household must show respect to him and his wishes. In his turn the head of the family should treat his brothers or sons equally, 'as alike as his two eyes'. A serious socio-religious offence committed by one member of the family would result in the excommunication of the whole family. As such the head of the family must watch the actions of all the members of his household and advise, warn or admonish them according to the necessity of the situation. The head of the family is answerable to the caste and the village councils for the members of his household, and this

entitles him to maintain a controlling hand in domestic affairs. In the case of the head of the family also, much depends on the character and personality of the individual concerned. An irresponsible head who becomes a liability to the members of his family forfeits his claim to their obedience and respect, and in such cases the sympathy of the village people is generally given to the dissenting members of the family. Even after separation it is good form to treat the elders with courtesy and respect. On the occasions of family reunions, such as those connected with the crises of life or with the annual offering of water to the spirits of the deceased, it is the eldest member of the family who occupies the dominant position. In general, even after separation his help is sought in cases of disease and difficulty, and in all matters involving priority of one or the other, preference is always given to the elder. The exact position of the head of the family would, however, vary according to the equations of different families, with which we propose to deal later.

The Deshmukh also figures at the head of the government or semi-government village officials, whose relative positions can be arranged in a tabular form as follows:

DESHMUKH
[Combining the offices of Mali Patel and Police Patel]

Sub-Inspector of Police
Head Constables
Masters
Constables

Patwari

FOURTEEN VILLAGE MENIALS

i. Kawalkar	viii. Kammari
ii. Talari	ix. Kummari
iii. Majkuri	x. Sakali
iv. Neerudi	xi. Mangali
v. Begari	xii. Ausula
vi. Yetti	xiii. Dappu
vii. Wadla	xiv. Kommu

The Deshmukh is the recognized headman of the village. Two hundred and ten acres of rent-free land, the normal revenue of which would have been Rs. 556/6/-, have been granted to him by the State. He also formally holds the offices of Mali Patel and Police Patel: in the former capacity he assists the government officials in the collection of land revenue, in the latter he helps the police in the maintenance of law and order. The Deshmukh used to cultivate the rent-free land earmarked by the government for persons working in these two capacities, but he had delegated his powers

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and functions to agents who acted for him. Now he gets a certain percentage of the total revenue collected in the village in lieu of the rent-free land. Thus, theoretically, the Deshmukh is both Mali Patel and Police Patel; but in actual practice these duties are carried out by his agents. In his capacity as Mali Patel of the village the Deshmukh takes steps to ensure the speedy collection of land revenue after each harvest and remits it to the district treasury. The Patwari can seek his assistance in matters connected with the land records and revenue of the village. For this he gets annually 5% of the total land revenue collected in the village. As Police Patel the Deshmukh is entitled to receive another 5% of the revenue collected during the year. In this capacity he has to send regular reports to the police regarding the occurrence of any crime in the village, keep an eye on the 'bad characters' and watch the activities of suspicious strangers. He maintains records of births and deaths in the village. It is his duty to assist the police in all possible ways in their investigations regarding criminal offences in the village. The other officials, such as the sub-inspector of police, head constables, constables and schoolmasters, are not a permanent part of the local population, and as such they do not generally get mixed up in local politics and other affairs. The police officials enjoy both prestige and power and are, in general, greatly feared by the people.

The Patwari, in spite of the fact that he is a petty revenue and land records official, occupies a pivotal position in the village and plays a very significant part in local politics. Being in charge of the land records, he can manipulate things both to the advantage and disadvantage of landowners, who often consult him and ask his advice. Of Patwaris in general it is said, 'What will they not do for a consideration? Give them money and they will prove their own father a bastard.' The present Patwari of Shamirpet is, for one in his position, a man of more than average intelligence and is himself a careful and substantial cultivator who owns some 247 acres of land jointly with his brother. He receives no salary from the government, nor does he have any rent-free land, but a certain percentage of the total land revenue is fixed by the government as his remuneration for the work.

All villages in Hyderabad State, as do most of those of middle and peninsular India, have a number of village menials. Their functions in the internal organization of the village are of two

623 threshing floors, topes, and other property used by the villagers in common, (d) the extension of village-sites and regulation of building, (f) the registration of births and deaths, (g) the control of pounds, (h) village protection, (i) improvement of agricultural stock and agriculture, (j) the promotion and encouragement of cottage industries, (k) the opening and maintenance of elementary schools, (l) the establishment and maintenance of Panchayat dispensaries, (m) gratuities to its officers and servants, (n) contribution to Joint Committee under Section 30 for any purpose in which the Panchayat is jointly interested and all other measures of public utility calculated to promote the safety, health, comfort or convenience of the inhabitants of the village, which are not included in any of the clauses relating to the District Board (vide Schedule 5 of the M. L. B. Act, 1930).

[652] **D. Supervision and Control :** The Panchayats were to submit copies of their budgets to the District Board, to the Collector and to the Inspector of Local Boards at Madras. The District Board and the District Panchayat Officer were expected to scrutinise the several items of income and expenditure.

The District and Assistant Panchayat Officers were to supervise the working and report on their progress to the Inspector of Local Boards. The reports of the minutes of the meetings would be recorded and reported to the District Board. Whenever a Panchayat was not working properly, and continued to be in an unsatisfactory condition for long, Section 45-A provided for the supersession of that body for an year and sometimes to another six months, when the administration would be entrusted to a special officer.

642 623 In 1941, the advisory regime in Madras wanted to introduce some reform in the matter of Panchayats and as such prepared a bill with the following provisions :— 1. introduction of ex-officio membership [622] of the village headman, who was also to be eligible for Presidentship, [624] 2. creation of whole-time executive officers for major Panchayats and the appointment of Village Karanams as Honorary Executive Officers of minor Panchayats, [651] 3. supervision and control of Panchayats by the District Collector, the Revenue Board being the co-ordinating body over the Collector, 4. compulsory levy of a house tax and an additional levy of 3 pies of land cess, and 5. provision for the appointment of a nominated Panchayat. A Committee was appointed to examine this bill. This advisory Committee reported that 1. the District Collector should be entirely divorced from Panchayat administration, 2. the Board of Revenue need have nothing to do with the Panchayats, and instead the post of a Registrar-General should

be created, 3. Panchayats should be created compulsorily in all villages in 5 years, 4. Village Officers should be precluded from Panchayats, though the headman might function as a temporary President for short periods in the absence of the President, 5. adult franchise for all men and women of 21 years of age and the system of ward division and voting by ballot should be introduced in all Panchayats, 6. only Panchayats with a normal income of Rs. 5000 and more should have whole-time paid executive officers, 7. the levy of house tax and vehicle tax should be made compulsory, but the proposed additional land cess of 3 pies should be optional, and 8. there should be no nominated Panchayats. 623 642 [624] [641] [651]

The only effect of this bill was an amendment that was introduced to the Madras Local Boards Act of 1920, by Act XIX of 1943, by which, whole-time executive officers had been appointed to all major Panchayats, and such of the minor Boards as had been notified by Government in this behalf. In April 1946, the Madras Village Panchayats Act of 1946 was published along the lines of the bill of 1941, with some modifications.

The power of Collector in the matter of supervision and control of Panchayats in the District was retained, though he was to function, subject to the control of the Registrar-General, who was to be the provincial supervising authority in the place of the Board of Revenue, originally provided in the Bill of 1941. The ex-officio membership of the Village Headman and his eligibility to exercise the presidential functions in the absence of the President or Vice-President through the Karanam as Honorary executive authority of the minor Panchayats, assigned in the Bill of 1941 was dropped out. The clauses for the Amendment Act of 1943 providing for the appointment of whole-time executive officers for notified Panchayats, had been incorporated in the new Act also. The provision made in the Bill of 1941 for nomination of members had been retained, though it was to be resorted to only in special circumstances, such as fraction or disorder in the village. [622]

But this Act was kept in abeyance while the Congress Ministry were thinking of introducing a thoroughly new Act.

At the time of the survey in 1947, the Panchayats were being governed by the Madras Local Boards Act of 1930. There had been no elections since 1939. Only the old Panchayats were continuing in power.